



PHOTO BY ROBIN SMITH

Patricia Sears works on her laptop at her kitchen table in her farmhouse in Lowell last month, while cameraman Ed Lalonde and producer Caro Thompson watch. Sears has broadband Internet access. Thompson is producing a series on digital and transportation connections in Vermont for Vermont Public Television.

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Lowell Is New Hotspot

Broadband Project Is Upcoming VPT Special

BY ROBIN SMITH
Staff Writer

LOWELL — Patricia “Trish” Sears sat at the kitchen table in a rustic farmhouse in mid-winter. Snow from the Valentine’s Day storm lay deep in the yard, and the wood stove radiated welcome heat. The house seemed very far away from the outside world.

Yet Sears, sitting with her laptop on her kitchen table, is able to do as much consulting work for worldwide organizations like Save the Children as she did when she lived in Washington, D.C.

Her home is now a broadband hotspot, one of 22 homes and businesses connected to the Internet at high speed through Lowell’s new broadband service.

They are featured in a two-part series coming in late spring or early summer on Vermont Public Television, called Connecting Vermont and produced by Emmy-nominated Caro Thompson of West Danville.

Sears and her husband Steve Mason already have a sign saying “WiFi Hotspot” ready to put out by the road next to the sign for their store. Kingdom Commons sells only Northeast Kingdom products and their own ground coffee.

Come spring, Kingdom Commons will also provide free Internet access for folks on their way to Burlington or Newport City. Travelers will be able to pull into their driveway on Finnegan Road, and connect to the world.

Lowell broadband

It hasn’t been so easy. The Internet was only accessible in Lowell through slow dial-up service on land telephone lines. But then the new broadband repeater was installed on a tower on Buck Hill, bouncing the service from Westmore to Lowell.

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And a transmitter for Sears and Mason went up on a tree behind their farmhouse, making their home and businesses a wireless access point.

WiFi is short for wireless fidelity, which in today’s high-tech language means all types of wireless tools will gain broadband Internet access in their driveway.

With broadband, Sears can continue to do consulting projects for groups like Save the Children through her company NEKTI Consulting.

“I am working on a par with my overseas peers,” she said.

She and Mason can both be online, and use Voice Over Internet Program (VOIP) for phone calls. She can transmit big documents quickly. During research, she can have many Web pages up at one time.

The ease of moving documents is what allows people like Sears to transport their businesses from the cities to rural Vermont.

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